

## COMMITMENT KEPT

Joshua 10:6-14

In public opinion polls why do we think politicians, car sales people, and media reporters have such bad reputations? What criteria do we typically use to make such distinctions? Most of us typically think in terms of “can we trust what these people tell us?” Whom do we trust the most? Whom do we trust the least?

We see a lot of advertisements for products and there are typically a lot of claims of how great the product is going to work and how long it will last. It may take some time for a new product to be evaluated and the word to get out but eventually the truth will become known and when we have such confirmation, then we can make better decisions regarding what we can trust.

In the political realm, we are exposed to a long list of promises that the person running for a particular office will do and some people will believe everything that is said and most of us are skeptical at best and refuse to believe any of what is said as an extreme response. We see this same phenomenon in many other areas where commitments or vows are made and the people may have had the best of intentions of keeping their commitments but something might change and the commitments are ignored. In some other cases the person making the commitment had no intention of honoring the vow that was made.

What about a situation in which we might agree to a contract and then we discover that the other person misrepresented themselves to us. An example might be that you hire a person to paint your house and he claims that he has a lot of experience and has been in that business for ten years. It is only after he finishes the job and it is less than perfect that you learn your house was his first painting experience. Should we still pay him for the work and the paint as we had agreed in the contract? What responsibility do we have before signing the contract? A 200-year-old Russian proverb was made famous by Ronald Reagan when he quoted it to Gorbachev when negotiating a treaty with them in 1987: “Trust but verify.”

When making a commitment, we should always do the “due diligence” to know with whom we are dealing and what the potential cost of such a commitment would entail. As Solomon advised in Ecclesiastes 5:5 “Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.” This was echoing what Moses taught in Deuteronomy 23:21-23 regarding making vows to God. Making a vow or commitment is not something that is to be done in haste.

Not only do we have a responsibility to do the right thing before making a vow or executing a treaty, we have the added responsibility of doing the right thing after the commitment has been made.

In our study of the conquest of Canaan, we find a situation that a hasty decision and lack of verification caused the Israelites to make a commitment that would prevent them from being fully obedient to what God had told them to do. That statement raises another concern that we need to consider. Which option takes precedence – honoring a bad commitment or doing what God has instructed us to do?

### A Commitment Remembered – 10:6

<sup>6</sup>Then the men of Gibeon sent *word* to Joshua to the camp at Gilgal, saying, “Do not abandon your servants; come up to us quickly and save us and help us, for all the kings of the Amorites that live in the hill country have assembled against us.” Joshua 10:6 (NASB95)

We remember bits and pieces of the account of what the Gibeonites did when they saw what had happened to Jericho and Ai when they were conquered by the Israelites. They

apparently knew that groups that were from outside of the area were to be treated in a different manner than those who lived in Canaan. A group of the Gibeonites dressed up in ragged clothes and carried along moldy bread to give the appearance that they had traveled a long way and had come from outside the land of Canaan. They approached Joshua and the other leaders and said they were from a “far country” and they had heard about all that God had done for Israel (but did not mention the conquest of Jericho and Ai). They wanted to make treaty or covenant with Israel. They would agree to be the servants of the Israelites if their lives would be spared. Joshua knew that cities outside of Canaan were not “under the ban” and so such an agreement would not be in violation of God’s command to totally destroy all the inhabitants of Canaan but to spare those who lived outside of the Promised Land. There was a big problem – the Gibeonites lied about where they lived since they were from a city very near Jerusalem.

Joshua learned of the deception after the covenant was made and he had a serious dilemma in that his commitment to the Gibeonites was contrary to the instructions he had from God to not spare any of the people in any of the towns of Canaan from the “cherem” that God had declared as His judgment upon the area. The consequences of not following the Lord’s command to utterly destroy all the Canaanites would be that these people would have a negative influence on the Israelites and cause them to sin against God.

That unfulfilled benefit of carrying out the “cherem” was of significance throughout the history of Israel because those who were allowed to live did contaminate the beliefs and religious practices of Israel up until and beyond the start of the Babylonian exile. Beyond these long-term influences, there were more immediate consequences of making such a covenant with “the enemy.”

One immediate consequence was in the form of having to protect the Gibeonites from their former allies. Gibeon had been part of a six city-state coalition that formed a powerful alliance for controlling the central part of the Promised Land. When Gibeon made a deal with Israel, the other five kings decided to punish them for their disloyalty. The rest of the coalition brought their armies to the area occupied by Gibeon and this is what triggered the message they sent to Joshua for help. Apparently, when Israel agreed to have the Gibeonites be their servants, they were then obligated to protect them. Warren Wiersbe commented that “When you make agreements with the enemy, expect to end up paying a price and having to defend them in order to protect yourself. This is why God’s people must remain separated from the world.”

In the midst of the negatives, we see the first of several positives that emerge from this account. The Gibeonites put their faith in Joshua to be a person of integrity. All they knew was that he was being used by the miracle-working God of the Israelites.

### Staying True to His Word – 10:7-8

<sup>7</sup> So Joshua went up from Gilgal, he and all the people of war with him and all the valiant warriors. <sup>8</sup> The LORD said to Joshua, “Do not fear them, for I have given them into your hands; not one of them shall stand before you.” Joshua 10:7-8 (NASB95)

Joshua was indeed a person of integrity and he faithfully responded to their act of faith in calling upon him for protection. Because Joshua made a faithful response, the Lord reassured Joshua that he would be successful in the battle that was to follow. Joshua’s response was to take the best of his army and to go from Gilgal where the Israelites were encamped to where the Gibeonites were being threatened.

We see faith at work on several levels. The first was the Gibeonites’ faith in Joshua as the representative of Jehovah. That was followed by faithfulness on Joshua’s part to keep his part of the covenant or treaty. That response was an act of faith in that Joshua believed that God

would be with him (as he did the honorable thing) even though he had not been given a direct order by God to go to Gibeon. This was followed by God's faithfulness to reassure Joshua that his confidence (faith) in God was not misplaced.

### Divine Intervention – 10:9-14

<sup>9</sup> So Joshua came upon them suddenly by marching all night from Gilgal. <sup>10</sup> And the LORD confounded them before Israel, and He slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and pursued them by the way of the ascent of Beth-horon and struck them as far as Azekah and Makkedah. <sup>11</sup> As they fled from before Israel, *while* they were at the descent of Beth-horon, the LORD threw large stones from heaven on them as far as Azekah, and they died; *there were* more who died from the hailstones than those whom the sons of Israel killed with the sword. <sup>12</sup> Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "O sun, stand still at Gibeon, And O moon in the valley of Aijalon." <sup>13</sup> So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, Until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies. Is it not written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky and did not hasten to go *down* for about a whole day. <sup>14</sup> There was no day like that before it or after it, when the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel. Joshua 10:9-14 (NASB95)

There is no evidence that God instructed Joshua to march all night from Gilgal which was 700 feet below sea level to Gibeon that was 22 miles away and around 3000 feet above sea level. Needless to say, they were exhausted when they arrived at Gibeon before daybreak. They had the element of surprise when they attacked the five armies of the kings that had gathered to punish Gibeon. They had great success and those Amorites that were not initially killed in the first wave of the attack ran off and tried to escape through a narrow passage that provided a way through a mountain near Beth-horon while the army of Israel pursued them. While they were trying to escape, the Lord intervened on behalf of Israel by causing large hailstones to fall upon the retreating armies and that was said to have killed more than Israel did with the sword.

The bad situation that came about because of Israel's carelessness in making a deal with the enemy was used by God to bring about a good outcome. If the five kings from the hill country had not decided to attack Gibeon, then the army of Israel would have had to fight five separate battles to carry out what God had instructed them to do to rid the land of those pagan influences. Instead, all five armies were gathered together to provide Joshua and his army the chance to get the job done in one battle. The downside of that five-for-one situation was that the battle was going to take an extended period of time.

Joshua realized that it would take more time than he had left to complete the "cherem" on the Amorites. If it became dark before the job was done, then many of the heathens would be able to escape and that could prove to be an ongoing problem for Israel. When we are faced with an impossible situation, what we need is a miracle and the Lord was available to provide Joshua and his army what they needed.

In what seems to be a bold move, Joshua commanded the sun and moon to stop so that his army could have enough daylight to complete the job. I find it rather interesting that Joshua knew that the sun could not stop its relative motion to the earth without the moon also stopping. Obviously, Joshua did not have the ability to stop the rotation of the earth, but the Lord God Creator of the universe did have that ability.

Some point out the apparent error of Joshua ordering the sun and moon to stop when it is the earth that is moving which causes it to seem to be that the sun and moon are moving. It really does not make any difference from a mathematical sense to think of the sun moving or the earth moving as long as the point of reference is defined. That concern is rather trivial compared to the rotation of the earth stopping (or slowing down) for a relatively short period of time.

Is there any other evidence from other world history sources that others had noticed such

a phenomenon? Around the same time as Joshua was leading the battles in Canaan, there was a report of an extended night in the area that is now Mexico. The Chinese during the time of Yao have reports that the sun slowed down and there was a concern that the world would catch on fire from the extended exposure to the sun. Other traditions are in the religious writing of the gods of India regarding the slowing of the sun and moon.

It has been reported that NASA scientists had calculated the motion the earth, sun, and moon and they had discovered a missing day. Some have claimed that account was a hoax and others say that it is not a hoax. Several ideas have come forth regarding asteroids coming close to the earth and exerting a gravitational pull that might have slowed the rotation. Along those same lines, some had calculated that if an asteroid with a diameter of around 480 miles had crashed into the Pacific Ocean near the equator that it would have been possible to slow the rotation of the outer mantle of the earth for a period of time, but would not have slowed the molten core rotation which would have eventually brought the outer mantle speed back to normal rotation speed. It would have produced one gigantic tsunami that would have had devastating impact in the Pacific Rim area of the world.

The reference to the Book of Jasher (literally the Righteous) was apparently a literary collection of songs written in poetic style to honor the accomplishments of Israel's leaders. It may have been poetic license that was in use when the event was described as the movement of the sun had "stopped" in one place and that the movement had "slowed down" in another place. The net result was that God enabled Joshua and his army to complete the tasks that He had commanded them to carry out. This is a good example of the saying that "whatever God commands, He enables us to accomplish."

We also see from this account that God will continue to use His people even when they make poor choices and commitments that may cause conflicts with God's will for their lives. The importance of knowing the truth of the matter and the consequences of our choices before the vows are given is clearly illustrated in this account of dealing with the people of Gibeon. We routinely face choices and most of the time we tend to be gullible and believe whatever someone might tell us. The responsibility for learning and acting upon the truth rests with each of us.